DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 217 033 SP 020 334

AUTHOR McNett, Ian, Ed.; And Others
TITLE Teacher Corps Networking: Purpose and Potential. A Position Paper.
INSTITUTION Far West Teacher Corps Network, Bellingham, Wash.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (ED), Washington, D.C. Teacher Corps.
PUB DATE Jan 81
GRANT G007603470
NOTE 23p.; For related document, see ED 195 550.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *Educational Cooperation; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; *Linking Agents; *Networks; Program Administration; *Program Attitudes; *Program Effectiveness; Secretaries; Teacher Centers; Teacher Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Far West Teacher Corps Network WA

ABSTRACT

This booklet describes the networking function of the Far West Teacher Corps Network, one of 12 networks set up in 1974 to share information on Teacher Corps projects and practices. In the first section, Teacher Corps networks are defined. Section 2 outlines the background and growth of the Far West Network in terms of its goals and accomplishments. Section 3 discusses the management role of the executive secretary in the network, and Section 4 deals with Teacher Corps networking experiences, with conclusions for effective participation. Design of future Teacher Corps networks is considered in Section 5, based on responses by Far West Network project directors and deans, Teacher Corps experiences, and reports on other networks. A developmental model is suggested, consisting of identifying local needs, implementing a network delivery system, and publishing documents and reports. (FG)

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TEACHER CORPS NETWORKING: PURPOSE AND POTENTIAL

A POSITION PAPER

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IAN McNETT

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January 1981

SP 020 334

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SECTION 1

Networks: To Share Potentials

Networking is a concept first used in anthropology and sociology to describe interactions among members of closely related groups. Its meaning has been extended to include interactions to spread ideas and to share ideas and resources. Educators adapted the term to refer to interactions among organizations or persons who hoped to influence the process of change. As used in this paper:

> A network is a nonhierarchical collaboration of equals who enter into a multifaceted relationship for the mutual benefit of all through the sharing of resources, the improvement of communications, and the support of common ideas and missions.

In 1974, national Teacher Corps provided funds for the creation of networks in twelve regions of the United States to enable local Teacher Corps projects to share solutions to common problems, to help determine what training was needed, and to provide such training. In 1978, Teacher Corps networks were defined as follows:

> Formal, composed of a fixed membership; temporal, duration defined by a contract; directed, mission determined by Teacher Corps regulations and program management needs; controlled, decisions subject to approval by the national office; funded, with money from outside the network membership; fixed, context determined geographically; limited, functions determined by national Teacher Corps; and exclusive, membership limited to project directors and deans of project colleges of education.

The following sections describe the usefulness of networking against the experience of the Far West Teacher Corps Network, and include attention to the Far West Network's experience, the role of the network executive secretary, networking from a Teacher Corps perspective, and a possible design of future Teacher Corps networks.

SECTION 2

The Far West Teacher Corps Network

The Far West Teacher Corps Network was established in 1975. It included projects in Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and the Trust Territories. The

network served a vast area and widely diverse target populations. Individual projects had varying objectives, but shared common general purposes and potentials which helped bind the network together.

Bylaws helped cement the network's mission of self-help. These bylaws directed the network to facilitate communication among network members, national Teacher Corps, professional associations, State Departments of Education, teacher training institutions, and agencies that serve children and youth. The bylaws also emphasized technical assistance which could not be supported by any one project.

National Teacher Corps guidelines stressed autonomy among network members and flexibility in terms of structure and organization. Each network appointed a board of directors and an executive secretary. The emphasis on self-determination changed in 1978, when the executive secretary was made answerable to national Teacher Corps rather than to the network board.

Strands of Growth

The Far West Network's growth can be gauged in terms of a productivity strand and of a human dimensions strand. Over time, change and growth could be observed in the increasing collaboration among projects and increased innovativeness, adaptability, and problem-solving capability. This growth occurred in the context of priorities established in 1975 by the network board. Major process priorities were:

> To develop a communications system to exchange program practices among network members.
>
> To develop a collaborative approach in designing and developing new or improved program components.
>
> To serve as regional spokesmen to national Teacher Corps about program and policy issues.

Within these overall process priorities, the following program priorities were established for 1975-76:

> A community component to involve the local community more successfully in each project.
>
> Inservice teacher education to provide effective retraining programs for public school and university personnel who would serve in local Teacher Corps activities.

Exceptional child programs to provide increased learning opportunities for children of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, for children with learning problems, and for the gifted.

Management information systems to manage information storage and retrieval for the network and for individual projects.

Project management and evaluation to help each project create an effective and efficient system for designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating its activities.

The Productivity Strand. The network stressed productivity in the form of workshops and conferences, which were held in each priority area from 1975-80. More than 700 participants took part in 17 workshops and conferences. Here are some examples:

A special education workshop to help teachers, administrators, and state education personnel acquire knowledge of current issues and trends in special education; to analyze their own programs; and to develop plans to remedy at least one problem.

A community education workshop for school staff, community coordinators, and community members active in local projects to develop skills and plans for working with school faculty, community councils, and other agency personnel and school volunteers.

A deans' conference on inservice training for deans of education and Teacher Corps project directors to learn of the development of inservice programs in schools and colleges of education.

The Human Dimensions Strand. The network emphasized helping member projects learn how to work together for the purpose of maximizing each project's potential and the total network's impact throughout the region. Though conferences and workshops served this dimension also, the network stressed other aspects of cooperation which led to successful group problem solving and strengthened interpersonal relationships. Here are examples of how the network matured:

Governance--At the outset, the network's board included the director of each project. In 1978, under a new national Teacher Corps policy, the board established a deans' council with representatives from each school or college of education that worked with network members. The board voted in 1979 to include three deans on its own

executive committee. This strengthened the board because of the deans' political stature, their varying interests, their expertise, and their ability to get things done on their home campuses.

Coping With Change--The network was shaken by a 1978 decision to make its executive secretary answerable to Washington, D.C., rather than to the projects. The board first sought clarification of the change. When this was not forthcoming, the board decided to continue its program as planned. In 1979, national Teacher Corps announced it would cease funding all networks, and that all funds must be spent by July 31, 1980. Rather than splitting the money among all projects or returning it to Washington, D.C., the network's board called a meeting to decide how the money should be used. Program priorities were established: to help institutionalize Teacher Corps projects; to prepare a report on the network that might encourage further federal support of networks; and to help projects share ideas that could be replicated in other projects.

Staying Fresh--The board sought to keep the network vital through internal and external evaluations. Overall objectives were to:

> Develop training activities to help projects meet their specific goals.
>
> Provide communication among projects.
>
> Help projects share materials and provide them with access to consultants.
>
> Respond to project needs in different settings.
>
> Promote collaborative decision making among projects.
>
> Link the projects with the National Technical Assistance Centers, the RTR Centers, State Education Departments, the organized educational profession, local education agencies, higher education institutions, and other networks.
>
> Provide managerial and technical coordination to put the preceding principles into effect.

In 1977, the board decided to assess the appropriateness of the goals and how well they were being met. It retained a consultant to try to answer the questions: (1) Is there a better, more cost-effective way to carry out network activities? (2) Has the network had a visible effect on projects and individuals? The consultant found that:

Project personnel acquired valuable knowledge and skills from network activities, but not all content was equally valuable to all participants.

Projects had effective practices that could be demonstrated and shared, including budgeting, training, and approaches to curriculum.

Network documents and resource listings were valuable, but project staff said they needed more discussion of particular ideas and suggestions.

Discussions at network meetings helped local personnel develop respect and trust for people from other projects.

Project directors valued self-help to improve their projects.

The study produced these suggestions for improvement:

More variety in program topics, formats, and consultants,

More small-group work sessions at network-sponsored meetings.

More staff visits to other projects.

More network-sponsored staff development.

More involvement of college of education faculty in network activities.

More involvement of "clients" in planning.

Visits by workshop trainers to projects to aid in implementing techniques presented at the workshops.

Sharing--Project directors emphasized the importance of being able to share their problems and successes with other directors. They valued sharing knowledge and skills related to assessment, documentation, management, planning, team leadership, inservice program development, community involvement, and instructional program development. Directors also valued the chance to test ideas in a nonthreatening, but critical, atmosphere. The network's 1978-81 objectives emphasized the importance of sharing:

To develop and implement a strategy for information sharing among directors to meet the unique need of one project; to help resolve problems shared by a group of projects; or to provide information or technical assistance for all projects.

To develop a process to validate the products and practices of network projects so that dissemination is appropriate.

To develop and implement a strategy for sharing information among deans of education who work with Teacher Corps projects.

Over its five-year life, the Far West Teacher Corps Network melded its concern for productivity with its concern for people. Productivity was demonstrated in terms of training, resources, and publications generated by and for the network's constituency. Concern for people was expressed in the network's role as a facilitating agency to help project personnel learn to work together, to become mutually supportive, and to grow as a result of interproject communication and problem solving.

SECTION 3

The Executive Secretary's Role

Network managers generally must deal successfully with things and with people. The experience of the Far West Network's executive secretary indicates that certain skills are needed to do the job and that certain functions must be fulfilled.

Dealing With People

To work effectively with people, the executive secretary needs certain characteristics and abilities:

Insight Into the System. Successful Teacher Corps executive secretaries must understand the Corps from both a Washington, D.C., and a local project perspective. They must also build personal and professional relationships with the educational community that interacts with network projects. These relationships are invaluable in developing programs and promoting change.

Insight Into People. Executive secretaries must understand organizational and group dynamics so they can help project directors work with their own staff members and clients to meet particular conditions and needs.

Flexibility Within Existing Systems. A network manager must promote innovation and change while working closely enough with the system being changed so that credibility does not suffer. This requires both organizational development savvy and sensitivity to institutional and bureaucratic needs.

Ability to Foster Collaboration. In a network, the executive secretary must be sure that each project has an equal chance to take part in managing network activities.

Dealing With Things

In dealing with people, the executive secretary also needs to make sure that things are taken care of--that logistics are in order, and that the processes and resources of the network are properly managed. This involves the following functions:

Management Functions. To manage a network successfully, the executive secretary must engage in:

- Planning to help the network members develop common goals.
- Assessing the needs of the network and its members.
- Working with diverse groups to accomplish common goals.
- Coordinating consultants for client projects.
- Linking various educational agencies with Teacher Corps projects.
- Reporting, informing, and seeking information at the national, regional, and local levels.

Production Functions. The executive secretary is responsible for the following tasks:

- Developing conferences, workshops, or other activities for the network.
- Writing for proposals, for reports and information purposes, and for routine office management.
- Insuring that network activities meet high quality standards.
- Documenting individual events and activities, as well as overall programming for the development of publications.
- Disseminating products, practices, and information within and outside the network.
- Demonstrating network products and practices to other groups within and outside the Teacher Corps.

Content Functions. The executive secretary manages and conducts conferences, meetings, and workshops to inform and train project staff and clients. This job includes helping the board develop the activity and carrying out board policy in managing the activity. The executive

secretary must conduct pre-conference meetings, develop pre-conference materials, commission papers, retain and brief consultants, and deal with conference logistics.

SECTION 4

Networking From a Teacher Corps Perspective

Examined through the lens of network theory, the Teacher Corps experience can cast some light on the past and suggest some future directions for those interested in developing or maintaining networks. Social service networks grew in response to the following: problems of scattered resources and sources of power; problems of noncooperation in hierarchical organizations; the need to build support coalitions to improve service delivery; and the need to spread innovations and to link groups with common problems. In the absence of outside funding, Teacher Corps projects must decide if continuing networking is worthwhile. The idea of flow--or interaction--among network members may help the Teacher Corps develop the next steps in networking. Flows include:

> Affect. Networks have been extremely important in helping Teacher Corps project personnel develop positive attitudes, encourage support for new ideas, share feelings about project operations and change, and evolve a common position among projects about teacher education issues.
>
> Knowledge and Information. Spreading knowledge has been an historically important network function. During much of its life, the Far West Network served as a conduit for top-down sharing from Washington, D.C., to the projects. Sharing among peers can be inexpensive and could serve as one reason for continuing to network.
>
> Training. Training has been a primary Teacher Corps mission. Network training can be economical, but even so, the expense may make it impractical without outside support. However, training is not critical to the idea of networking.
>
> Opinion Modification. Because of the top-down nature of the networks, this interaction was not fully developed. However, networks can serve as excellent vehicles for testing and molding opinion. They can provide a valuable service in shaping informed educational opinion at the state, regional, and national levels.

Evaluation. While not a direct purpose of Teacher Corps networks, evaluation occurred when project directors were able to sense where their projects were going in comparison with peers' projects. Evaluation suggests hierarchy and probably works at cross purposes with other network interactions.

Influence. While influence is not a purpose of Teacher Corps networks, the confluence of active and knowledgeable leaders in teacher education provides a sounding board for trends and ideas. This influence need not be political, so much as the result of expertise.

Objects. Teacher Corps networks have not shared objects such as books and audio-visual equipment. However, networks can have great importance in spreading innovations and sharing costs.

Labor. Sharing labor has not been a major purpose of Teacher Corps networks. However, project directors have discovered talents in other projects and found consultants through the network.

This variety of interactions provides clues to planning future networks. Some simplification of the flows may be needed as a network considers a future without a charter or funding from Washington, D.C.

Shared Elements

While networks exist in great variety, a number of elements seem common to all of them. Some important elements are described here.

Alternative to Established Systems. Networks exist because traditional bureaucratic organizations tend to resist innovation and change. In the past, Teacher Corps networks united project directors and deans in new forms of communication, interaction, training, and decision making. To be a workable alternative, future Teacher Corps networks should involve all interests within a region, not just the Teacher Corps bloc. These interests can use the network as a forum. The network should remain ad hoc, changing its focus and membership as issues change. And it should seek to foster collaboration among units which usually are viewed as competitive.

A Sense of Community. Teacher Corps networks have provided members with a sense of common purpose. Elements related to common purpose that might provide the basis for continuation include: (1) dissemination of network products and processes to the educational community at large;

(2) continued mutual support among network members for dealing with ongoing problems and issues; (3) publication of information and findings which are important for project directors; (4) new forms of interaction such as the deans' council with the board of directors as an important prototype for the future; and (5) regional definitions of problems as useful guides to long-range planning, as checks against parochialism, and as bases for improved use of resources.

Voluntary, Equal Participation. While in the past membership in Teacher Corps networks was mandatory, in the future it will be voluntary and based on the interests of members. Membership should imply equality in terms of benefits and responsibilities.

Practicalities

The Teacher Corps experience suggests that frequent meetings of network members are important for a number of purposes. For example, network governance was provided through meetings. Meetings limited the need for structure, promoted informality, and helped keep the structure flattened. Training was another important reason for meetings in the past. With the passing of outside funding, the training function may wither away. However, visits by project directors to other projects through network sponsorship could continue. These visits might help spread ideas and approaches much less expensively than large-scale training events. With projects scattered over great distances, the Far West Network found it useful, too, for the executive secretary to visit projects to share information and innovative techniques.

Following are conclusions based on the Teacher Corps experience with meetings:

> Network events seemed more successful when resources from inside the network were used in planning and delivering programs than when an outside "package" was delivered through network sponsorship.
>
> Programs that stressed interaction among participants seemed to have the greatest impact.
>
> The use of speakers one after the other produced disinterest among participants, who would pursue their own agendas in preference to listening to a series of speeches.

Ice-breakers and group dynamics techniques helped build intergroup communication and relieve tension felt by new participants in network events.

Regular adjustments based on participant feedback after each session met participant needs more directly than could be predicted prior to a meeting.

Participants gained more when meetings were informal than when they were regimented.

Educational settings, rather than hotels, should be used when possible, especially when the institutions used the innovations that were being discussed.

Permitting different members of the project staff or outside persons to attend different conferences helped build support for the project and understanding of the Teacher Corps.

Other Practicalities. Where face-to-face communication is impractical or unnecessary, other forms of communication help maintain the interchange of information. Newsletters were found useful in disseminating information. They helped build a sense of cohesiveness among network members. Publications based on network activities and themes offered a way to cooperate and communicate that did not depend on travel. They helped reinforce network cohesiveness. Information and solutions to problems also were shared via letters from the executive secretary to all projects. Telephone contacts were used to supplement other forms of communications. The disadvantage of the telephone is that records may not be maintained and information can become distorted in retelling.

Conclusion

Networking has helped advance the purposes of local Teacher Corps projects in the past. Network theory and the Teacher Corps experience justify further exploration of networking by local projects, even in the absence of outside funding.

SECTION 5

Design of Future Teacher Corps Networks

Networks serve a myriad of purposes. Teacher Corps networks dealt with problems of change, but served other purposes as well: dissemination, training, control of procedures developed by Washington,

D.C., validation, and informal social interaction. While these functions have some value, too many purposes can lead to confusion. As Teacher Corps looks to the future, two purposes seem feasible for network activity: development and dissemination of project innovations, and fostering collaboration among persons and organizations concerned with teacher education.

Taking on the spreading of innovation would require a major change in Teacher Corps network practice. It would mean generating energy and ideas from network members, rather than from Washington, D.C. The network would serve as a project-directed vehicle for helping spread innovations from the developer to other projects and then to sites beyond the projects. Such a change effort requires support, which could become an important rationale for a new concept of Teacher Corps networking. In such an effort, the major focus becomes maintenance of communications for transfer of project-produced information.

Collaboration among a broad segment of the teacher education community complements a dissemination effort. Again, this calls for a change in Teacher Corps networking, spreading the interaction beyond projects to include state education officials, professional associations, interested private citizens, and other departments of project universities. The network would become a forum for discussion of education issues that related to Teacher Corps concerns. The network would have a major role in building a constituency within a region for teacher education.

Background for Decision

Project directors and deans of the Far West Network were asked five questions concerning network continuation. Their responses and other studies provide the basis for the following discussion:

1. Should the Network, in some form, continue, given that problems of funding can be worked out? Response ranged from strong enthusiasm to undecided. There was a sense that the network was ready for a change, but respondents did not mention the need to recenter the network from a Washington, D.C., orientation towards group-directed activity. They did state that without the network, projects

would lose training opportunities, a support system for project directors, the energy and knowledge of the deans' council, and an information link with Washington, D.C. Projects would also lose opportunities to make decisions collaboratively, to interact with other project staffs, to share problems and resources, to find quality assistance for projects, and to make important statements about educational issues.

2. Would your institution be willing to provide some funding? What would it expect in return for support? There was no willingness to commit funds to support the network. Project funds were reported as too tight. Benefits of network involvement were not seen as sufficient to merit local support for a network. Without the network, projects would lose both high-cost and low-cost activities. High-cost activities included staff training conferences, publications, travel for meetings, expensive newsletters, and support of the network office and executive secretary. Low-cost activities that would be lost included telephone contacts among project directors, formal and informal newsletters, sharing project products by directors and deans, face-to-face contact among project staffs, meetings which "hitchhike" on other conferences, contacts with the larger teacher education community, listing of resources, publications, and consultants, and visits to other projects in conjunction with other travel.

The large number of activities suggests a weeding out to isolate important values of common concern that possibly could be supported inexpensively.

3. What other groups, persons, or resources might be included in the network because you would find the contact useful, because their support would increase the stance of the network, or because they might have funding? Responses were inconclusive, but mentioned state education agencies, teacher associations, state or regional teacher centers, professional education groups, and chief state school officers. The issue of membership probably needs to be addressed in the context of the purpose and future direction of the network. Broad-gauged networks could take on complex

educational problems. Since Teacher Corps has experience in this area, it could provide leadership in establishing such networks.

4. What purposes would the network serve? Answers tended to reflect current network practice. This failure to discriminate among purposes may reflect past experience in which national Teacher Corps laid out the plan of action. Network members may have been insufficiently experienced in discussing purposes.

5. What benefits of the network's experience would you see as most attractive to others? Answers, though limited, included the general concept of networking, collegial interaction, training, and information sharing.

Limited responses to the questionnaire may indicate that it was time to terminate the network, or that project directors saw no point in the exercise because of the funding issue.

Starting a Network

If, however, a group of project directors wanted to continue the present network or start a new one, a number of steps seem necessary. These are based on the Teacher Corps experience and reports on other networks.

An Idea About Change. Most networks begin because important ideas require the collaborative effort of those who eventually become involved in the network. Teacher Corps networks grew from the common concerns of project directors about staff training and teacher education. Ideas that are too abstract or too limited are not likely to generate a cooperative effort. Most social service networks have an element of a "good cause." Ideas might include improving use of resources, sharing personnel, cooperating on service to clients, improving communications, supporting innovative ideas, disseminating research findings, cooperating for training and personnel development, or supporting project operations.

An Individual Leads. Even when an outside force such as national Teacher Corps establishes a network, an individual must assume responsibility for key tasks related to the network. These tasks include organizing the members and building support, determining priorities, setting up headquarters, and developing communications. It is

generally true in network formation that one person is the moving force and organizer. This person is highly energized, respected, committed, and able to attract and use support to foster collaborative action. A person who takes the lead in re-establishing Teacher Corps networks should be committed to change, be knowledgeable about teacher education resources, be able to devote the necessary time and energy to forming the network, and have considerable stature among peers.

Limits are Needed. The network must determine the number of missions it can handle. Focus will be based on available resources, the purpose of the network, and the commitment of members. Then, the network must be limited to a reasonable number of members. Close, regular interaction works best with fewer members in a limited geographic area. If contacts are limited and less regular, a network can encompass more people and a larger geographical area.

The Resource Question. Teacher Corps networks were generously supported by an outside funding source. Such support is not necessary for a successful network. Many network activities can be carried out at relatively low cost. Essential support might be available through project overhead or on an exceptional basis from a project university. The network idea need not be negated because expensive activities such as conferences cannot be continued.

Importance of Communication. Any network must insure communication with and among members on a regular basis. If communication wanes, so does the interest of members and the visibility of the network. Communication can be inexpensive, but all members should be kept uniformly informed and involved in network activities. Usually, one person, an executive secretary, takes responsibility for network communication.

Maintaining Momentum. Once established, the network must maintain members' interest and continue to meet their needs. If burdens and benefits are not equally shared, the network may falter and fail. Generally, a lead person is required to make sure responsibilities and benefits are distributed evenly. However, this need not be a full-time person if the network is a low-cost operation.

Tracking Reality. Networks need some procedure for checking on their achievements, progress, and problems, and making sure that they are dealing with the real concerns of their members. Unlike bureaucracies, networks can be flexible and easy to change as conditions change. The Board of Directors performed this function in Teacher Corps networks. If these networks are to continue, ways need to be found to redirect the networks as changes occur.

A Model for Network Activity

The model is shown on page 18. The three basic components of network activity as contained in the model are:

> Identifying needs of local projects and the network as a whole, and the resources capable of meeting those needs.
>
> Implementing a network delivery system to utilize people identified as network resources to bring skills and information to projects that need them.
>
> Publishing documents and reports to meet needs not met by human resources.

Identification. Network personnel identify and report the needs, problems, strengths, and resources of the local project. The reports are analyzed and compared by the network board to:

> Pinpoint specific areas of need and strength throughout the network.
>
> Determine strengths and weaknesses common to many projects and thus characterizing the network as a whole.

Delivery System. The network promotes development of needed skills in local projects through a delivery system which:

> Matches a project which needs certain information or skills with people or projects that possess such resources.
>
> Designs training activities which convey the needed skills and information. The training may take the form of information workshops, observation and demonstration activities, or problem-solving activities, as follows:

Project Need	Activity Designed to Meet Need
Awareness	Information workshop
Skill development	Observation and demonstration
Adaptation of general knowledge	Problem-solving activities

Steps in implementing the training component of a delivery system are:

Mature project or expert is paired with other project or individual.

Mature project or expert develops and organizes materials for awareness workshops and presents workshops.

Mature expert develops exemplars, samples, and opportunities for skill development activity and records as case study.

Project in need or learner attends awareness session, participates in skill development activity, and organizes demonstration of application which expert reviews for consistency to model.

Mature project or expert certifies that the learner has become an expert on the topic.

This delivery system may be seen as a developmental model for (1) transforming learners into experts who teach new learners, and (2) building on the results of training activities to modify and improve the delivery system. (See illustration on page 18.)

Document Development. The final component of the network model is production of resources to meet project needs that were not met through the delivery system. These products include the following resource documents:

Information handbooks describing concepts and techniques.

Catalogs of samples, exemplars, and demonstrations of techniques and processes.

Directories of training sessions and other network activities.

Implementation reports that list activities and people involved.

Implementation reports that describe processes used in network activities and resultant products.

Validation reports describing processes or products which are being used and documenting evidence of their effectiveness.

Reports documenting the impact of an activity on the project or network.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

STRENGTHS IDENTIFICATION $A_1 - A_2 - A_3$	NEEDS IDENTIFICATION $B_1 - B_2 - B_3$
TRAINING ACTIVITIES	
A paired with a B	
A prepares materials	Awareness session
A prepares samples and demonstrates techniques	Observation and demonstration session
A documents processes and product	B organizes problem-solving activities using expert, materials, techniques
A prepares model for validation	B reports on implementation
A certifies B as a new A on this topic	B identifies strength / New A B identifies needs / New B
REVIEW OF EFFECT	
Site visit or projects that report implementation	
Survey of project attending awareness session	
Interview of participants in observation and demonstration session with follow-up observation of those reporting use of techniques	

Key: Expert or resource = A
Learner or person in need = B